

———— Forwarded message ————

From: Shea Gunther

Date: Mon, Mar 26, 2012 at 12:14 PM

Subject: You applied for a position at my clean tech news site

Hello,

If you're reading this, it means that you applied for one of the positions open at my new clean tech news site (this ad-> <http://louisville.craigslist.org/wri/2894902027.html>). I'm Shea and it's been my job to do the first read-through of the 900+ applications that have poured in as a result of our ad.

I have gone through each of the applications as they have come in and picked out the best 50 or so to be passed into the second round of consideration. Some of you are amazing candidates that I am really excited to learn more about. Those of you who are passed into the second round of consideration will be hearing from us soon, if you haven't been contacted by us already.

Others applications have come in from strong writers who just aren't a great fit for what we are trying to do. When you have a pool of 900+ applications, you can be picky, and we passed over many worthy people simply because they don't have enough experience in clean technology and green media. I would advise anyone without enough of the right experience who wants to break into environmental writing to start a personal blog and write about the things you want to get paid to cover. You are welcome to get back in touch with us in the future after you've built a more focused portfolio.

Beyond those two groups, there were applications that were skipped over after just a quick read—the brutal truth is that the very worst applications got less than a few seconds of consideration. Often I could tell from the first few words of an application that it would be passed over. I was helped by the fact that we are hiring writers; if a person can't craft a good email applying for a writing job, she's unlikely to be the kind of writer we are looking to hire.

As I went through your applications, I couldn't help but jot down ideas on how some of you could improve your job hunting email skills. As evidenced by the response to our ad, there are a lot of people out there looking for work right now and you need every advantage that you can get if you want to beat them to a good job. If your application email sucks, you are going to be left looking for work for a long time because you will get flushed out with the first filter every time you apply for a job. Some of your applications are that bad.

I have broken my suggestions down into a list of 42 writing job application dos and don'ts.

Good luck.

• **Do be a badass.**

I actually hired one of the 900+ applicants within minutes of reading his application. He writes for a popular site that I'm a huge fan of and is a terrifically talented writer. After I first read his email, I looked up his writing and found a lot of articles that I have enjoyed over the years. I replied back asking if he'd like to work for us. Later that day, his friend and colleague applied and was similarly insta-hired. These two guys are dream hires for us (don't tell them that though, don't want them to get cocky around the virtual office) and it was easy to pull the trigger and bring them on board quickly.

A lot of those applicants who passed into the second round have experience writing for outlets like the New York Times, the Huffington Post, the Washington Post, CNN, MNN, and Mashable. When I saw a portfolio link from sites like that, I quickly added the writer to the second round list and moved on to the next new application. A prominent portfolio link won't get you hired by us, but it will earn you a closer consideration.

• **Do read the ad and do exactly what it asks.**

Here's the section of our ad that describes how to apply:

...

If you would like to apply for any of the positions detailed above, please send an email with "Clean Tech Application" in the subject and the following information included or attached:

- Your resume
- 2-3 social media links (your public Facebook account, Twitter, StumbleUpon, that kind of stuff)
- One paragraph on why we should hire you
- 3-5 links to great things you have written

Please note: We're sticklers for details.

All initial hiring decisions will be made by April 1st.

I made it very clear that anyone interested in the jobs described in the ad should send an email with "Clean Tech Application" in the subject with a resume, 2-3 social media links, 3-5 links of great portfolio pieces, and a paragraph on why the applicant was worthy of a hire. Right below that I even included a strong hint that we're sticklers for details. I meant it.

The ideal application was a correctly subjected email with a paragraph of text, 2-3 social media links, and 3-5 portfolio links. It was a test for how much attention to detail you actually pay and it was a valuable tool to have in the filtering process. I didn't adhere to a strict policy of passing over applicants because they didn't exactly fit into the ideal, but when I was faced with a borderline applicant who shared eleven stories he had written, I was more inclined to pass him over.

- **Don't talk yourself into being filtered out.**

An application email is not the place for over-zealous humble self-awareness. Some of you lead your email saying that while that you may not be the greatest writer or have any experience in clean technology or an English degree or even ever blogged before, that you are ready to prove yourself with your hard work and perseverance. While I appreciate the admission of not being the perfect candidate, you don't want that to be the first thing you tell me if you want me to hire you. It shouldn't be the third or ninth either. Talk about your strengths, not your weaknesses. Let your work speak for you.

- **Don't tell me how great this job would be for you.**

One of the best things about starting up a new site like this is being able to give good work to great writers. I am happy and excited to help someone further their career goals and pay their bills, but that is not the first thing I want to read about in your application email. Focus on telling me how you can help out our organization.

- **Don't boast about how many articles or posts you have written.**

I'm not impressed by someone who has "written more than 10,000 posts!". I might be impressed by someone who has over ten years years of experience in online media, but reading someone rave about the incredible number of posts they have written usually made me click right over them.

- **Don't tell me that you are skeptical of me.**

One of you kicked off your application by telling me that you had done some research on us and that you were skeptical because the internet is a crazy place. You were an easy one to skip.

- **Don't send Squidoo links.**

No offense to Seth Godin and his fantastic team at Squidoo, but a Squidoo link probably should not be used as an example of serious writing work that you've done. I would say the same goes for anything done on Associated Content, Examiner, eHow, Mahalo, Demand Media, or any other content-farming website.

- **Don't start every sentence in your application with 'I'.**

A few of you were guilty of this one. Switch up your words.

- **Don't send me your picture.**

I don't care what you look like.

- **Do capitalize and use punctuation.**

a job email int a txt mssg 2 ur bff

- **Don't put your cover letter/introduction text into an attachment.**

Make it easy for me to get excited about hiring you. I don't want to have to open a word document to read about why you'd be a good hire, put that up front and center in your email.

- **Do keep it short and sweet.**

Tell me a little bit about yourself— where you've written before and a few sentences on why you are awesome. Short and sweet.

- **Don't describe yourself as zany, crazy, or wild.**

Zany is not high on the lists of attributes we're looking for. I don't imagine it's high on the list of many companies, this side of birthday clown agencies.

- **Don't ask me questions.**

I had 900+ email applications to go through. I'm not going to email with you and answer questions about the job on the first pass. If you want to apply, give me the information asked for in the ad. If you want to know more about me and my partners, click over to Google.

- **Don't talk about SEO.**

I know it's important for a site to have good SEO and all, but I don't want to hire writers who stress their ability to write "SEO-optimized" or "keyword dense" stories. Our primary goal is to develop great content, not to try to position ourselves better for Google's spiders.

- **Don't apply using a Gmail profile picture of you making a pouty face.**

You know, like this— <http://is.gd/poutylips>

- **Don't tell me how afraid of Facebook you are.**

If you are a writer who publishes work online and you're not on Facebook, you are likely to get left behind. It's important to understand how social media works and Facebook is, right now, where social media is at. Saying things like "Facebook is scary because people can steal your information" and "social media gives me no benefit" tells me you just don't get it.

- **Do have a good reason for why I should hire you.**

The reason I want to hire you is because you're a great writer with experience

covering the topics I want to focus on. You're reliable, creative, tenacious, and easy to work with. That's why I want to hire you, not because you are ready to use your degree or because you really need a job or because you love writing SO much. This one is really important—your first sentence needs to introduce you to the reader and clearly lay out why he would be crazy not to hire you. Put yourself in the mind of the person doing the hiring and tell them what you can do to make his life easier.

- **Don't write badly.**

Like I said above, I am thankful that we're hiring writers. If someone can't write a good application, they're not going to be able to write a good story. Some of you are just bad writers. It's harsh, but true. Anyone can write, not everyone can get paid to do it.

- **Don't use a pen name.**

We're not going to hire a pen name. We're going to hire a person.

- **Do aim low if you don't have the experience.**

I'm 1,000% more likely to hire someone without a strong background in green media as an intern than as a staff feature writer. If you don't have a lot of experience, you often have to start from the bottom. Working as our intern isn't glamorous, but it is an entry into the world of green media. If you don't have a particularly deep background for a job, see if there is a lower level position within the same company or industry that you are qualified for. Getting the first job is the hardest and aiming low can ease that difficulty and get your foot in the door.

- **Do use paragraph breaks.**

454 words is a tad much for a leading paragraph. Somewhere under 100 words is ideal. Remember— short and sweet. Your entire first email probably shouldn't be more than 250 words in all.

- **Don't ask me questions answered in the ad.**

"Are you by any chance looking for editors and proofreaders who can work from home?"

Yes, as we clearly stated in the ad.

- **Don't just send your resume.**

Seriously. You're just wasting all of our time. The same goes for one and two sentence applications.

- **Don't use junky stats to make yourself look good.**

Numbers can be a great way of quantifying the reach and impact that a writer has, but only when done with good stats. Good stats are things like your Twitter follower count, the number of fans your Facebook author page has, and the

number of years that you've been working in online media. Junky stats are things like claiming the entire readership of a large site (someone bragged about how they wrote for a content farm site that pulls in more than twenty million readers a day), the number of Facebook friends you have, or vague claims like having "a following of more than 50,000." You have 11 Twitter followers and you have a following of 50,000?

- **Don't get crazy with the text formatting.**

You'd be perfectly fine if you sent everything in size 12 Helvetica or Times New Roman. There shouldn't be six different sizes and typefaces used in your email. And lay off the emotes and other little icons. I like a good :D or :) as much as any guy, and sometimes you just have to (' ° □ °) ' ^ _ (_ _) , but not in the very first email that you send me.

- **Don't use the word "passionate".** [Ed. note: *DO keep your punctuation inside your quotation marks.*]

It's entirely over-used. Don't say you have a passion for something or are passionate about a topic. "Ever since I can remember" and "Ever since I was a little kid" showed up a lot too.

- **Do tell me what position you are applying for.**

Preferable in the first sentence or two. A lot of applications either waited until the end of their email or left it out entirely. And saying that you would be fine with anything I have to offer comes off sounding desperate.

- **Don't send me your poetry.**

I'm sure it's perfectly lovely poetry, but we're not hiring poets at the moment. Stay focused on sharing writing that shows off things that I am looking to hire for.

- **Don't bounce back and forth between the first and third person.**

It's just weird.

- **Don't brag about not doing things you're not supposed to do.**

Think about it—should you really be telling me that you never have confrontational relationships with editors or that you never flake out? There is no reason to ever tell a prospective employer that you won't do something you shouldn't do. It goes without saying that you won't get confrontational with us and that every assignment will come in on-time and spell-checked. Also, don't tell me that you don't write fluff and that you don't cut-corners. You're not supposed to do those things.

- **Don't offer to snail mail me an article that you've written.**

I'll leave this one at that.

- **Don't talk shit about your current or past employers.**

File that one under Job Applyin' 101.

- **Don't waste my time by telling me you're not going to waste my time.**

A few of you spent the first few sentences verbally dancing around with things like "Time is money, so I'll keep this brief" or "Since I am pressed to get everything into one paragraph, I won't waste any time by beating around the bush. In fact, I will not even waste your time by..." Cut the chatter and get to it. Along those lines,

- **don't think aloud.**

Think about what you want to say before moving your fingers to type. Saying things like this are not particularly effective-"Where do I start? How can I describe why I would be a great hire for you?" or "Why should you hire me? Blech...that question always throws me for a loop."

- **Don't tell me you have had a busy week and will be sending your resume later.**

I understand not wanting to miss a window of opportunity for a job, but if you don't have everything together required of a job application, wait until you do before you send your first email. Your initial introduction to a potential employer shouldn't be one that suggests you may lack good time management skills. Or even worse was the guy who said that since he's been working in accounting for the past ten years, he doesn't have a resume to submit but that he'd be happy to share the names of people who would vouch for him.

- **Don't challenge me and my writers.**

One of you issued me a challenge to show that you are better than any of our current writers. That comes off like the drunk local guy at the pub asking to arm wrestle everyone in the joint.

- **Don't try to be funny.**

Comedy is hard to get right and easy to screw up. I appreciate a good joke and a sense of humor is pretty much mandatory for fitting in with the rest of our crew, but don't treat your application like a stand up act.

- **Don't spell things wrogn.**

See what I did there? Seriously though, a misspelled word is a huge buzz kill for someone wading through a flood of job applications. It implies that you are too lazy to proof your own work or to have someone edit it for mistakes and it doomed many of your applications to be passed by.

- **Don't email me a novella.**

One of you sent me an 11-page resume with a 2,500+ word email. For a

moment I thought Dwight Schrute was applying for a job. Short is best. A resume should be no more than two pages, the application email itself no more than a few paragraphs.

- **Do read everything out loud before you send it.**

And keep doing it while you edit until everything sounds like you want it to.

- **Never go anywhere without your towel.**

The Universe is a strange place.

Good luck with the job hunt!

Shea

- Just to reiterate- if you've been accepted into the second round of consideration, you will hear from us directly, if you haven't been contacted already. If you don't hear anything more from us it means that you got passed over. Please don't email me to ask about the status of your application. Thanks!